

Testimony in support of HB 6759

Submitted By:
Jessica Bialecki

Good afternoon Sen. McCrory, Rep. Curry, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Jessica Bialecki. I live in New Haven and I am the Executive Director at the Connecticut Children's Museum, which includes Creating Kids Childcare Center.

I am testifying in support of HB 6759 An Act Concerning Early Childhood. I want to thank you for recognizing in section 1 of this bill that compensation for early educators is the issue facing the early care and education sector. Implementing the OEC Compensation Scale would finally pay early educators wages comparable to public school staff with the same degrees.

This is an issue that is very important to me. At Creating Kids, we are lucky to have extremely loyal staff who have been with us for many years. But they shouldn't have to sacrifice financially, be unable to save for retirement, or pay an enormous amount out of pocket for health benefits just to stay at a workplace they love. For the new staff openings we have, it's impossible to hire qualified staff when people can make more money working at Target, or just about any other retail job, than they can shaping the brains of our next generation. It's unrealistic to expect someone with a Bachelor's degree to accept \$35,000 a year, but that's all we can offer with current funding levels.

We need funds added to the OEC Early Care and Education line item to increase the per child payment to providers for School Readiness slots so we can continue to provide the high level of quality care and instruction that our families need and rely on. If staff wages increase and operational costs continue to rise due to inflation, but funding remains stagnant, we will no longer be able to participate in School Readiness, and ultimately, we may no longer be able to keep our doors open, which would be a devastating loss for our community.

What is missing from this bill is how it will be paid for. I urge you to support increasing payments to the state funded early care programs and the creation of a wage equity fund similar to what was created in Washington DC to increase wages for early educators without adding to the child care cost burden that families already face.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and I am happy to answer any questions.